

1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey

Data Preview II: Child Restraints

Following are results from the 1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The survey employed two questionnaires, each administered by telephone to a national sample of approximately 4,000 randomly selected persons age 16 and older. Interviewing began November 5, 1998, and continued through January 12, 1999. The data are weighted to yield national estimates. Detailed results from the survey will be published later in a series of NHTSA reports.

Children Riding in the Front Seat

A number of tragic air bag-related fatalities among children in the past few years has underscored that the back seat is the safest seating position for children in a motor vehicle. NHTSA and others have urged that children age 12 and younger ride buckled up in a rear seat. The survey explored whether the public has accepted this message by asking drivers about the seating position of the youngest child, age 12 or younger, living in their household (almost 1400 cases in the survey). About half (48%) stated that the child did not ride in the front seat at all in the past 30 days while riding with them, and 15% said the child rode in the front seat only a few times during the same time period. But 16% reported that the child rode in the front seat nearly all the time and 6% claimed it occurred most of the time.

The survey also questioned drivers about whether the seating position of the child is now different than what it was 12 months earlier. Over half (51%) said that the child is now less likely to ride in the front seat when they drive. Nineteen percent indicated that the child is more likely to ride in the front, while 23% reported that the child is just as likely to ride in the front compared to a year ago. Those who said that the child was less likely to ride in the front most often gave "safer in back" (59%) and "danger from air bags" (21%) as reasons. Reasons for increased front seat riding included "child prefers the front" (41%) and "no other place for child in vehicle" (22%)

movement of children from car seats to seat belts. The age and weight breakouts in the Table are based on small numbers, their purpose is solely to show the general trend and consistency across years.

Concerns Over Booster Seats

The data show that booster seats are not being used as much as they should be. The survey asked the above driver subgroup whether they had ever seen or heard of booster seats. These drivers would be expected to be the segment of the population most familiar with the devices. But 21% replied that they had not seen or heard of them, and 3% didn't know if they had. Among the 76% who were familiar with them, almost one-third (30%) had concerns about booster seats (another 7% were unsure), generally questioning how secure the attachments were and how well the child was restrained. Thus among the total driver subgroup, fewer than half (48%) knew about booster seats and had no concerns about them.

Requiring Restraint Use By Children

As shown in the Table, the vast majority of the public believe children should be required to wear seat belts when they outgrow car seats, and that all children should be required to be in restraints. The public also favors strong enforcement of child restraint laws.

Car Seat Use By Children Under Age 6

The survey asked detailed questions to a subgroup of drivers (defined in a footnote to the Table on back; 754 cases) about car seat use by children under age 6. Most (71%) claimed that the child rode in a car seat "all the time" when riding with them as they drove. As shown in the Table, this figure noticeably declines at about ages 3-4, largely reflecting



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		1998	1996	1994*
** Parents/Caregivers				
The child (under age 6) rides in a car seat ALL THE TIME when you are driving and he/she rides in the vehicle with you.	Total	71%	63%	59%
	Child's Age:			
	Newborn (140 >N>115)***	98%	96%	88%
	1 Year (107>N>79)	99%	89%	86%
	2 Years (143>N>127)	95%	91%	85%
	3 Years (131>N>101)	80%	75%	56%
	4 Years (153>N>132)	46%	33%	33%
	5 Years (149>N>123)	22%	17%	17%
	Child's Weight:			
	Less Than 20 (88>N>81)	99%	96%	93%
	20-29 Pounds (194>N>175)	95%	86%	89%
	30-39 Pounds (250>N>234)	76%	68%	60%
	40+ Pounds (254>N>227)	38%	29%	27%
Total Population				
On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means police should hardly ever give tickets, and 10 means police should give a ticket at every opportunity for violations of child car seat laws, how strict should police enforcement be?	1-3	5%	7%	6%
	4-6	9%	12%	10%
	7-9	23%	22%	20%
	10 (Every Opportunity)	60%	53%	58%
	Don't Know/Refused	4%	6%	6%
****What about when children outgrow a car seat? Do you agree or disagree that they should be required by law to wear seat belts when riding in a vehicle?	Agree	94%	94%	94%
	Disagree	3%	4%	4%
	Depends On Age	2%	1%	1%
	Don't Know (DK)/Refused	1%	1%	1%
****How old do you think children should be before they are not required by law to wear seat belts or do you think all children should be required to wear them?	Required Of All Children	81%	85%	81%
	Under 6	2%	1%	2%
	6-12	3%	3%	4%
	13+	6%	4%	4%
	Not Required Any Age	3%	1%	---
	Don't Know/Refused	1%	1%	3%
	Disagree/DK/Refused To Previous Question	5%	5%	6%



* Minor adjustments have been made to 1994 age and weight numbers for analytic consistency across years.

** A subgroup of drivers who answered detailed child restraint questions. They were: a) parents of children under age 6 (usually living with them, but also a few parents not living with the children but who sometimes drove with them), and b) non-parents living with children under age 6 who sometimes drove with them. *** The number of respondents in this category in each year was between 115 and 140. **** Slight change in wording in 1998.